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# Heroic Lineage and the Evolution of the Individual

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## **Heroic Lineage and the Evolution of the Individual**

## Introduction

I have always been fascinated by Greek mythology, especially the way in which myth and history can become so intertwined. The Homeric epics are two prime examples of this that have always attracted my interest. I am astounded by the ways in which the characters of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* can be so far beyond the realm of normal humans and yet at the same time still seem so accessible. I believe this is one reason that when picking a thesis topic, I could not imagine discussing something that was not at least tied to the two main and most remarkable heroes of the two works. The stark contrasts and convoluted relationship of Achilles and Odysseus had always drawn my attention.

When reading the *Philoctetes* by Sophocles in a Greek seminar last year, I became obsessed with the character of Neoptolemus who was by far the most intimate and troubling hero in the play. Also, having read Virgil's *Aeneid*, I was astounded by the extreme differences in Neoptolemus' depiction there and in the *Philoctetes*. While examining the character of Neoptolemus in other ancient literature I became more and more confused as I tried to piece together exactly what type of a person he was. When I finally decided to attempt to link these two areas of interest, a very extraordinary connection between Neoptolemus, his father Achilles, and Odysseus became apparent to me. While Achilles and his son never actually meet, Neoptolemus steps in to the Trojan War soon after Achilles' death, and almost seems to represent a rebirth of Achilles. Odysseus provides the link between Neoptolemus and Achilles at all points in Greek myth, telling Achilles of his son's exploits in the *Odyssey*, and providing Achilles' armor

to Neoptolemus as well as stepping in as an almost second father figure to the young hero.

After establishing this unique and rich connection I decided to examine more closely what exactly ties the three heroes together and how, if in any way, their interactions can shed light on the inner workings of Greek myth. I decided to start from the ground level and work my way up, first attempting to understand the time in which these heroes existed, and then following the progression of their lives.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, two of the most well-known and studied ancient works of all time, are based on the workings of a society that is quite different than ours today. A better understanding of the beliefs of this society, which I will broadly term as the heroic system, will greatly assist in explaining the behavior of the majority of characters in the two works, as well as the repercussions of their actions. Many Iliadic heroes, such as Diomedes, Agamemnon and Ajax to name a few, are completely guided by this heroic system and act completely in concert with its tenants. However, the main characters of the two poems, Achilles, and Odysseus, both behave in unusual ways not warranted by the society of their time. It is this unusual behavior that provides the main substance of both works and introduces the most interesting questions.

Achilles appears as a hero completely defined by his power and militaristic ability. However, Achilles' questioning of the war effort during the *Iliad* is the central point of the entire poem, and puts the entire heroic system into question. Odysseus at the complete opposite end of the spectrum is a hero defined by his intelligence and cunning. The description of Odysseus' many successes due to his unique behavior as well as the oft-times negative reactions to that behavior brings the heroic system into question in an

entirely different way. When examined together these two opposing modes of behavior provide an in depth criticism of the heroic system as well as the beginnings of a transition into a newer and more beneficial societal belief system.

An examination of the second generation of heroes that have been directly influenced by Achilles and Odysseus will show the next step in this evolution out of the heroic society. The foremost vessel of this change, and the one that will be discussed in this paper, is Achilles' son Neoptolemus. Neoptolemus represents a perfect transition between the old heroic system and next generation because while he is part of the new heroic generation, he was also present at the end of events at Troy. Also, while Neoptolemus, as Achilles' son, is an obvious continuance of Achilles' questioning process, Neoptolemus is also in frequent contact with Odysseus throughout his life, and is influenced very heavily by the cunning hero in many of his most important experiences.

A full discussion of Neoptolemus' life and his relationships with Achilles and Odysseus will help to exhibit first how the two older heroes failed. What about their approaches made them unable to fully transition out from under the heroic system? This will occur through an inspection of many small excerpts on Neoptolemus' life as well as Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, which provides Neoptolemus' fullest part in any extant work. Secondly, this examination should determine whether the evolution was successful, and to what end it progressed, or whether a reversion back to the heroic system occurred because of certain failures of the new belief system.

## Chapter 1

### Achilles and the Heroic System

The code of values behind the Iliadic heroic system is illustrated most clearly in the first interaction between Agamemnon and Achilles in book 1 of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon must give up the girl Chryses, his prize from an earlier battle, because of a plague placed on his army by the god Apollo. He is angered by this loss because it takes away from the honor he has earned. Seth Schein points out that the Greek word for “honor”, *time*, also means “price” or “value” in a more real way.<sup>1</sup> This is because honor is gained through the accumulation of physical wealth and prizes. Agamemnon feels the need to replace his lost honor by taking from one of the other Greek heroes who has a lower status. Agamemnon chooses Achilles after they quarrel and takes Achilles’ prize, a girl named Briseis, to replace Chryses. This is a terrible insult to Achilles because of the values he holds due to the heroic system that currently enmeshes him and all the other heroes. Achilles’ honor is decreased because of the greed of another hero who is supposedly his ally. Achilles is angered by the manner in which his honor has been taken. It is only plausible to obtain honor through the conquest of another people. Agamemnon has skewed that system by taking honor directly from a fellow Greek hero rather than an enemy. This is quite different from earning more honor than another Greek hero due to

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<sup>1</sup> Seth Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, p. 71: This “honor” is not merely an abstraction. The basic meaning of *time*, “honor,” is “price” or “value” in a tangible sense. The word can be used of a woman like Briseis, who was a *geras* or special “gift of honor” from the army to Achilles, as well as of the seat of honor, full wine goblets, meats, and fertile land mentioned by Sarpedon as rewards for prowess in battle and reasons for continued bravery and achievement.

the spoils received from an actual battle. This conflict within the heroic system is what gives rise to the events in the rest of the poem.

When Agamemnon takes away Achilles' honor, the earning of which is the utmost goal of the heroic system, Achilles withdraws from the rest of the army and refuses to take part in the fighting. Agamemnon's disregard for one of the tenants of the heroic system makes Achilles question the system in its entirety. As Schein says, "Achilles comes to question and contradict the validity of the normative social value system."<sup>2</sup> In his greed Agamemnon has disrupted the heroic system unknowingly, by questioning the validity of the way in which honor (the objective upon which the whole system is based), is obtained. While Agamemnon does not even notice the defect he has uncovered, Achilles starts to wonder if the heroic system really is the only way of living or if he can lead a better life outside of it. Although this questioning is painful to Achilles it also provides a formerly unobtainable opportunity for him to look beyond the constraints of his society. Achilles tries to understand what the real values are behind a system with tenants that can so easily be misconceived or even disregarded completely. He then questions the reason for the war on Troy because it is entirely a result of that system, but cannot find an answer aside from what he has always known. They are all fighting to earn honor and glory because they do not know any other way to behave.

Achilles' honor has been taken from him outside the context of war, the only context in which earning honor is valid. If Achilles had lost Briseis in a raid on his camp by foreign invaders he would have been angry but he would still have been able to accept it. The fact that this insult has assaulted one of the central values of the heroic system

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<sup>2</sup> Seth Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, p. 71

enrages Achilles and forces him to withdraw from the war and find a new alternative other than force with which to respond to Agamemnon's insult. As Schein says in *The Mortal Hero* (p. 110), "Achilles wants Agamemnon to suffer as he himself has suffered. He forces to the surface the real moral question of the poem: what, in a heroic world, is the true measure of value?" It is this process that eventually leads Achilles to see beyond the boundaries of the heroic system and begin to step past them.

Achilles starts this process by attempting to make Agamemnon suffer in a very physical way that is fully warranted under the heroic system. Achilles originally withdraws from the war because he wants Agamemnon to feel the pain of losing his soldiers and the war but also so that Agamemnon will feel Achilles' absence as a warrior and beg for him back. In Book 1 of the *Iliad*, lines 240-44 Achilles rages at Agamemnon:

• • • • • / μ : • • • μ  
 • / μ • , • • • • • / • • / : • •  
 • μ • μ / • μ • • • • • .

"Certainly longing will come over all the sons of the Achaeans for Achilles; but then, grieving, you will not at all be able to be useful, when many fall after being killed by man-killing Hektor: you will tear your heart within, being angered that you did no honor to he who is the best of the Achaeans."

Achilles makes it clear that his goal in withdrawing is to make Agamemnon suffer and realize the gravity of his mistake in dishonoring Achilles. However by the time that



Agamemnon realizes his error and attempts to remedy it, Achilles no longer cares about that form of payback.

In Book 9 of the *Iliad* Agamemnon sends an embassy to Achilles to promise him back the girl Briseis as well as a massive amount of other treasures. This should have been enough to assuage the pride of any hero no matter how bad he had been insulted. Not only is Agamemnon replacing the original honor he took from Achilles but also he is promising to increase it hundredfold. If Achilles were still controlled by the heroic system he would have certainly accepted this offer and returned to the fight. Instead Achilles refuses the treasures and after denying the attempt at reconciliation, goes even further and tells the embassy that he is leaving Troy altogether. This is in effect Achilles' explicit denial of the heroic system since he has decided that it is no longer important for him to fill his role within it. In *Iliad* 9.315-21 Achilles lays out clearly the new outlook that he has acquired:  $\mu \cdot \mu \quad \cdot \cdot \mu \quad \mu : / \bullet \bullet \quad \bullet \bullet \quad \mu \cdot \mu \cdot \quad \cdot \cdot \cdot \cdot$   
 $\cdot : / \quad \bullet \cdot \mu \cdot \quad \cdot \cdot \cdot \quad \cdot \cdot \cdot \cdot \quad \cdot \cdot$ . "There is an equal fate for the one staying back and for someone who would fight, in one honor are both the coward and the brave, the man who is slothful dies just the same as the man who works much." Achilles uses the two extremes of heroic society, the  $\cdot$ ,  $\cdot$  man who hides at home and the  $\cdot$ ,  $\bullet \bullet$  man who goes to war, as a way to show the pointlessness of the heroic system. Achilles explains that both these men have the  $\cdot \mu \cdot$ , "same fate", are held in  $\bullet \bullet \mu \cdot$ , "one honor" and they both  $\cdot \cdot \mu \cdot$  "die similarly". Achilles is taking the pillars of the heroic system, honor and fate, and claiming that they mean nothing. Achilles realizes that the tenants of the heroic system that are identical for every person, might not actually be the best type of governance for each different individual. How can one definitively say that the farmer who leads a long and peaceful life at home is worse

off than the soldier who dies young but is highly honored? It is the total denial of these ideas that truly convinces the embassy that Achilles is lost to them. None of the heroes in the embassy can even comprehend how Achilles can say these things, and thus attribute his refusal to his rage at Agamemnon rather than his shedding of the heroic system.

To understand the reason for this denial we must look at the situation facing Achilles. His eyes have been opened to the limitations of the heroic system by the treachery of Agamemnon. Achilles now realizes that his destiny that before seemed so certain might now be avoidable. Achilles' mother Thetis explicitly reminds Achilles of this destiny on numerous occasions but most notably in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, lines 415-18:

• • •        •    • •        • • μ / • •    , •        • μ        • μ        : / • •  
 • • μ    • • μ        • •    •    •        / • •    :        • • •        • μ        . “Would that  
 you were supposed to have been by the ships, tearless and apart from harm, since now  
 your destiny is in a small time and indeed it is not a great time at all; but now you are at  
 the same time both quickly dying and full of misery concerning everything: thus for an  
 evil fate I gave birth to you in the house.” Thetis refers to her son as • μ        , a word  
 unused to describe anyone but Achilles, meaning “quickly-dying” or “dying early”.  
 Thetis' reminders do not leave room for any other path as is shown in this speech her  
 repetition of the small amount of time before Achilles' death. Achilles is doomed to fight  
 Hektor and to die soon after.

However, Achilles was only doomed in a system where earning honor is the utmost purpose. Once Achilles comes to realize that fighting and earning honor are not the only ways to live, he is no longer restricted to this system or to this one fate that had been foreseen for him. What is the real point of earning honor outside the context of his own society? Does honor actually mean anything in the larger scheme of life or is it more

important to enjoy life to the fullest by living it as long as possible? Achilles sees that he could just as easily return home and live a long and happy life with his family. Of course he would not become widely famous for his exploits but he would at least live a full life. This is the point in time at which Achilles stumbles upon the concept of the individual who looks to his own personal needs and desires over the ones forced upon him by the beliefs of his society. This is the state of mind Achilles is in when the embassy from Agamemnon comes to win him back: *μή μοι ἔσθ' ἵκεν ἄλκιμονα Πηλεΐδην ἔμπεδον ἔειπεν ἄνθρωπον*. “Nor is there any advantage to me, since I suffered pain in my heart, always throwing my soul to fight.” The word *ἔμπεδον*, in this context deals with how advantageous something is, but typically this verb means “to lie round about”, and specifically it is used to describe Achilles as he hugs the dead Patroclus. Achilles does not think he gains anything from fighting, and the mode of conveyance of this fact is a pointed reminder of what Achilles has lost in this war. Thus we see that while Achilles is incapable of gaining anything from battle he can still lose much. In actuality he suffers pain *ἔνθα*, “in his heart”, *ἔμπεδον* at throwing his soul into the danger of battle. Achilles here is using the word *ἄλκιμονα*, “soul”, in a way that it is not generally understood in the *Iliad*. In the way Achilles’ *ἔμπεδον* gives his soul an identity he is equating it with something other than just the breath of life that it means to most heroes of his time. Achilles’ idea of soul has evolved to a more modern conception held in our current society of something that contains identity outside of the body. This goes hand in hand with Achilles’ realization of the individual. Achilles’ new understanding of his potential for life and his new conception of a soul are what make it impossible for him to agree to fight at this point in time. Thus he denies the embassy.

However, before Achilles can make good on his promise to sail away, his dear

friend Patroclus convinces Achilles to let the compassionate warrior fight. While Achilles is not attached to the heroic system any longer he is still extremely tied to his close friends. Strong relationships are an integral part of the individualistic mode of living that Achilles has embraced. Patroclus is still firmly enmeshed in the heroic system which is why he feels so much pain at seeing his comrades failing and dying. He feels the need to defend them and earn honor in doing so: • • • μ • • , • μ • • • • • / μ , • • μ . “But send me out quickly, joined together as a companion with the rest of the Myrmidon host, so that perhaps I may become a light to the Danaans.” Here in 16.39 Patroclus wants to become a , “light” to the Achaeans in their time of need. This indicates his search for glory and links him with the other hero that is most powerful at this point in the poem. Hektor whose epithet is , “of the shining helm” is currently routing the Greeks and cannot be stopped by any Greek. Patroclus’ wish to be a light coupled with his subsequent description in lines 16.279-80 as μ μ , “shining/glittering”, shows his wish to be a great hero such as Hektor at the same time as it foreshadows his eventual meeting with the Trojan hero. Achilles gives in but warns Patroclus not to advance too far as he is attacking the Trojans. In a way Achilles is admonishing Patroclus that if he becomes too caught up in the glory that battle brings he will pay the price. This is a fact Achilles has only just managed to realize. Unfortunately Patroclus becomes enmeshed in the aspirations of the heroic system and is killed at the hands of Hektor when he goes too far in pursuit of honor and glory. The loss of Patroclus is what jars Achilles back into the heroic system. However, now that Achilles has realized the insignificance of the system it has become hollow and meaningless to him. In effect he is only living now so he can avenge Patroclus’ death as warranted by the close relationship of the two.

It is at this point in the poem that we see two new sides to Achilles that have never been witnessed before, one of intense savagery and one of sincere kindness and forgiveness. In Achilles' rage he falls back into the heroic system that he is most comfortable in and attempts to get revenge for Patroclus' death through that medium. In *The Mortal Hero* Schein concisely illustrates Achilles' unfortunate predicament at this juncture of the *Iliad*. "He (Achilles) envisions that Hektor's death would 'pay back the spoils' of Patroklos; this is in line with the conventional value system, illustrated so often in the poem, whereby loyalty to a comrade and heroic honor are satisfied by the death of the slayer of that comrade, or at least by the death of another enemy warrior."<sup>3</sup> Sadly, this type of vengeance is no longer satisfying to Achilles because Achilles no longer believes in the system within which it makes sense.

Achilles tries everything he can to make this type of revenge work. First Achilles ruthlessly drags Hektor's corpse around the walls of Troy. He does this both to disfigure the body even further as well as to cause even more suffering for Hektor's family members who are watching from the city (22.395-404). Achilles then goes beyond acceptable modes of vengeance and sacrifices twelve captured Trojan youths on the pyre of Patroclus, an almost unprecedented act (23.175-76). Interestingly however, Achilles' final act in the *Iliad* is one of extreme compassion. Priam, the father of Achilles' most hated enemy appears to Achilles and asks for the body of his son Hektor Achilles, kindly provides Priam with both his son's body and safe passage instead of capturing his enemy or killing him in another fit of rage (24.599-602). This compassion seems to be a sign of Achilles' understanding of his fate. He accepts his death and befriends Priam as a partner who shares in his suffering. This acceptance truly shows us the tragedy present in

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<sup>3</sup> Seth Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, p. 132

Achilles' failed attempt to separate himself from the heroic system. Achilles' compassion shows that he has given up on the revenge that would have been proper within the heroic system, effectively showing Achilles' acceptance of his inability to move back within that system. Unfortunately Achilles also understands that it is now his fate to die but he is unable to take solace in the timeless honor he will receive after his death since he does not believe in the heroic system where this honor is important. This is the tragedy of Achilles' fate.

As Achilles begins to realize that he will not be able to achieve satisfying vengeance he resigns himself to his death. Achilles no longer fits within the heroic system but he is also unable to pull himself fully out of it now that he has killed Hektor. Thus as was ordained by Zeus, there is only death and glory left for Achilles. Tragically Achilles no longer fully believes that the timeless glory he is about to receive is actually as important as his contemporaries would have him believe. Achilles is more concerned with the life that he is missing outside of war, and the close relationships he will be losing with those near to him. Because Achilles has defined himself as an individual with different beliefs than the ones provided for him by his society, he does not take satisfaction in the honor he will receive after death.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Odysseus and *Metis***

While Achilles challenged the heroic belief system and began to define himself as

an individual, another hero was able to assert his individualism without fully challenging the heroic system. Odysseus is established as a unique hero when his behavior is compared to that of the majority of Homeric heroes. Although Odysseus is one of the two most widely treated characters in Homer, it is obvious that he is not normal by the heroic standards of that time. When discussing this warrior/hero system in *Odysseus and the Genus 'Hero'*, Margalit Finkelberg comments, "There can be no doubt that this is a pattern into which Odysseus of the *Odyssey* would never fit."<sup>4</sup> Odysseus' wiles are repeatedly mentioned in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and he is viewed negatively by some of his contemporaries for the deceptive ways in which he achieves his goals. The reason for this is that Odysseus challenges the heroic system that he participates in and deviates from it as he sees fit. Odysseus is a different type of hero who, unlike the majority of Iliadic heroes, is able to act in non-heroic ways and does not necessarily hold himself to the expectations of the heroic system. However, Odysseus is not exactly similar to Achilles either. Achilles manages to obtain a very advanced, almost culturally unbiased view of the system and finds he is no longer able to fit in a suitable role within it or even accept the system itself. Achilles sees the world as an individual outside the context of any one society and tries to base his subsequent decisions on this new understanding while he is still limited to using the tools he learned in the old system. Odysseus on the other hand, never fully deviates from the heroic system, and thus does

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<sup>4</sup> *Greece & Rome, Vol xlii, No. 1, April 1995: Odysseus and the Genus 'Hero'*, Margalit Finkelberg, page 1: "This attitude of the Iliadic warrior is epitomized in the following words of Sarpedon to Glaucus: Ah, friend, if once escaped from this battle we were for ever to be ageless and immortal, neither would I fight myself in the foremost ranks, nor would I send thee into the war that giveth men renown, but now – for assuredly ten thousand fates of death (κῆρος . . . θανάτω) do every way beset us, and these no mortal may escape nor avoid – now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory to other men or others to us. There can be no doubt that this is a pattern into which Odysseus of the *Odyssey* would not fit."

not face the same philosophical dilemma as Achilles, but is naturally able to exploit the system through his inherent and unusual brand of action and ethics.

The most apparent aspect of Odysseus' divergence from the Iliadic idea of the hero is seen in the context of the *metis* – *bie* opposition; that is, the opposition of 'cunning' and 'force'. Throughout most of Achilles' life he is the almost perfect extension of the *bie*, 'force' concept. Achilles is the strongest warrior in the *Iliad* and is given preeminence over many of the other heroes because of this. In book 1 of the *Iliad* Achilles uses his *bie* as an extremely powerful bargaining chip with which to counter Agamemnon's power through kingship. When Agamemnon takes away Briseis, thereby insulting Achilles, Achilles only responds by withdrawing from the war. The loss of Achilles' *bie* from the war effort is such a strong motivator that Agamemnon eventually tries to win back Achilles by offering a massive wealth of treasure as well as a large parcel of land and his own daughter's hand in marriage.

In *Iliad* 22 Achilles is chasing Hektor around the walls of Troy, unable to catch him but completely invested in killing him. Achilles is in a way shackled by his *bie* and is unable to do anything outside the realm of force. Although Achilles had recently pulled away from the typical Iliadic heroes the loss of his friend Patroclus dragged him back within the heroic system. Achilles' new understanding of the limitations of the heroic system brought about by his hiatus makes it impossible for him to smoothly live among the other heroes ever again. Achilles' new status as a self-reliant and personally driven individual causes him to react more intensely to his experiences, especially when related to other people who he establishes relationships with. These reactions show up in the *Iliad* as Achilles' excessive exemplification of the main heroic values, especially that of



*bie*. For this reason Achilles becomes excessively violent, behaving more like a bloodthirsty animal than a sensible hero attempting to gain honor. The most notable example of this is Achilles' rage at the death of his friend Patroclus. Because of their close relationship Achilles' reaction to Patroclus' death is excessive even by the standards of the warlike society of the *Iliad*. This same reaction can be seen in Achilles' surprisingly compassionate dealings with Priam when the old king comes to request Hektor's body. Achilles' establishes a relationship with the king based on their shared suffering and loss. This feeling of kinship is what causes Achilles to act so compassionately.

Odysseus, on the complete opposite end of the spectrum, remains governed for the most part by the rules of the heroic system and earns honor and glory through the use of *metis* rather than *bie*. Odysseus' ability to use *metis* allows him not only to figure his own way out of most problematic situations without a god's intervention, but also to determine what situations are better to leave alone. An example of this comes in *Odyssey* Book 9 lines 40-46 when Odysseus tells the Phaeacians the story of the sack of the city of the Cicones:

$$\begin{aligned} & \bullet \quad \bullet \bullet \bullet \quad \bullet \quad , \bullet \quad \bullet \bullet \quad : \bullet / \bullet \quad \bullet \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \mu \quad \bullet \\ & \quad \quad \quad / \bullet \quad \mu \quad \bullet , \bullet \mu \quad \mu \quad \bullet \mu \mu \quad \bullet \quad . / \bullet \bullet \quad \bullet \bullet \quad \mu \bullet \bullet \bullet \quad \bullet \\ & \bullet \quad \mu \quad \bullet \mu \quad / \bullet \bullet \quad , \quad \bullet \bullet \mu \quad \bullet \bullet \quad . / \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \mu \bullet \\ & \mu \quad , \quad \bullet \bullet \mu \bullet \bullet / \bullet \quad \bullet \bullet \quad \bullet \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet : \end{aligned}$$

“Then I sacked the city, I destroyed them; taking women and many possessions from the city we divided them up, so that no one might go being stinted of equal share by me. Then I commanded that we flee

quickly by foot, but those great fools were not convinced. But then they drank much wine, and ate many sheep by the shore and many rambling-footed twisted cows.”

Odysseus is blatantly showcasing his *bie* exploits here, using the first person verbs • and • , “I plundered” and “I destroyed” to show his major role in conquering the Cicones through force. It is Odysseus’ actions after the taking of the city that label him as unheroic in the terms of the *Iliad* and set him apart from the other warriors. Odysseus suggests μ •μ , “we should flee”, rather than staying and enjoying the hard-earned plunder as do the rest of the warriors. Although Odysseus’ crew disregards this suggestion because of its obviously un-heroic connotations it turns out that it was the right decision. It is these types of decisions that earn Odysseus a negative reputation among the other warriors and heroes but they are also what keep him alive.

The unusual nature of Odysseus’ *metis* is made clear even more strongly when he is described working in tandem with a hero fully invested in force. At the end of book 10 in the *Iliad* Odysseus and Diomedes commit a very un-heroic deed. In Book 10 line 383 Odysseus and Diomedes capture a Trojan spy. The spy gives himself up, asking only to be saved in return for a ransom. Odysseus responds, \_\_\_\_\_, μ • • .

“Take courage, do not let death be within your mind.” Odysseus cheers up the spy, saying

(take courage!), and convincing him that he will go free. Odysseus’ behavior here shows how he uses his *metis* to create false relationships so that he does not become emotionally involved, a mode of behavior diametrically opposed to that of Achilles. Once they gathered information from the spy however, in 10.455-56, • • • μ • /

• • • , “[Diomedes] struck him in the middle of the neck with a sword, smiting

him.” While Odysseus uses his speech to falsely convince the spy of his safety Diomedes straightforwardly kills him, exhibiting the very different ways in which the two heroes behave. In 10.246-47 Diomedes explains that, *• • μ • • • μ / • • μ μ , • • •*. “By following this man [Odysseus] we might both return even from blazing fire, since he knows to think.” The reason Diomedes chooses Odysseus as his companion is because *• • •*, “he knows well how”, *• •*, “to contrive” or “devise”. Diomedes is a hero of solely *bie* as Odysseus makes clear while they are on the actual raid, *• • • • • μ : • • / • μ μ •*, “but come bring forth your powerful might; it is not at all necessary for you to be standing with your weapons as an idle man.” Odysseus calls on Diomedes’ *• μ*, “powerful might” to use for the task of killing the sleeping soldiers in the camp of the Trojan’s allies. The descriptions the two heroes give of each other are completely opposed, Odysseus is useful for his thinking while Diomedes is distinguished by his power and might. This cowardly act is considered very un-heroic because of the deceptive way in which it was carried out. Odysseus’ lack of *bie* is made even more evident by the comparison with the violent Diomedes as well as by Odysseus’ encouragement of Diomedes and restraint from actual acts of violence. This episode highlights the peculiarities of Odysseus’ behavior. He is specifically chosen for a task of deception and subterfuge because of his unusual talents that are blatantly juxtaposed with Diomedes’ use of strength.

As mentioned briefly in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, Odysseus also captured the Trojans’ prophet Helenus by deceit. On the island of Lemnos Odysseus sends a messenger disguised as a merchant to convince Philoctetes that he should leave. The merchant describes Odysseus’ capture of Helenus;

μ • • , / μ μ• • , • μ •• μ / •• , • • •  
 • • μ , / •• •• • • • •• • / • • • .

There was some noble prophet, the son of Priam, he was called by the  
 name of Helenus, who this man, coming alone by night, deceitful  
 Odysseus took, whom word tells is entirely shameful and disgraceful.”

Odysseus is described as • • • •, “shameful and disgraceful”, because of  
 the demeaning way in which he often acts (dressing up as a beggar), as well as ,  
 “deceitful” because he steals Helenus by trickery rather than in a straightforward manner.  
 Interestingly these adjectives carry even more meaning because of their method of  
 conveyance. The merchant telling this to Philoctetes is actually one of Odysseus’ sailors  
 in disguise, whom Odysseus has sent to trick Philoctetes into trusting Neoptolemus. Thus  
 this passage actually carries a double layer of deception and even more clearly exhibits  
 Odysseus’ unorthodox behavior. Although this deed is extremely beneficial to the Greeks  
 and allows them to take Troy, it also depicts clearly the way in which Odysseus’ *metis*  
 separates him from the other *bie*-defined heroes. Ajax, Agamemnon, Achilles and the  
 others are too proud and straightforward to dress themselves in any disguise let alone in  
 the appearance of beggars. This willingness of Odysseus to act in ways considered taboo  
 by his peers is what allows him to earn honor under the heroic system without being  
 destroyed by it.

Tales of Odysseus’ cunning nature also abound in the *Odyssey*. One of the  
 primary episodes that showcases Odysseus’ wiles occurs in the land of the Cyclopes in  
 the cave of Polyphemus. Polyphemus traps Odysseus and his crew in his giant cave in

book 9 of the *Odyssey*. The situation with Polyphemus is unique in that it does not seem conquerable through force. Polyphemus, as a giant Cyclops, is almost the embodiment of *bie*. As Zeus himself puts it on lines 1.70-71, • μ , • • • μ • / •

, “godlike Polyphemus, whose might is greatest among all the Cyclopes.”

Polyphemus is identified by his excessive • , which has a very similar meaning to *bie*, that of strength or might. After drinking a bit too much of Odysseus’ unmixed wine Polyphemus asks for Odysseus’ name in lines 9.407-08:

• • • μ • • μ , • • • / • : • μ • , •  
 • • / • • μ • • μ : • μ • / μ • • • • •  
 • • •

“Cyclops, you ask me my glorious name, so I will tell you; but you give to me a guest’s gift, as indeed you promised. Noman is my name; My mother and father and all my other companions call me Noman.”

Odysseus tells Polyphemus that his name is • , meaning Noman, the pronoun form of the adjective • , meaning “no one”. Odysseus is using his *metis* to create a false host-guest relationship that Odysseus will later be able to exploit. In this case Odysseus creates a fake name for himself, changing his identity and straying even further from the idea of the individual that was so important for Achilles.

When Polyphemus calls for help from his neighboring Cyclopes after being stabbed in the eye he tells them, ‘• , • μ • • • .’, “O friends, Noman kills me by trickery, not by force.” The other Cyclopes take the proper noun form as the adjective and decide that Polyphemus must be crazy if he is screaming that no one

is killing him. Not only does this show the deceptive nature of Odysseus, the phrasing of Polyphemus' sentence also reminds us of the *metis* – *bie* opposition. Odysseus' *doloi* stands in for *metis* and Polyphemus specifically remarks that Odysseus does not use force. Even more interestingly at certain points in this episode the *ou* of οὐ is replaced by the negative μὴ that turns it into μὴτις, a homonym for the *metis* that is generally used to describe Odysseus. Thus Odysseus' fake name in this passage becomes a synonym for “wisdom” or “cunning”. Polyphemus is in effect yelling out that wisdom is what is killing him. This extremely clever, almost arrogant way of defeating Polyphemus clearly highlights what is so unique about Odysseus. As Odysseus tells himself in lines 20.20-21, οὐκ ἔμελλε μὴτις / οὐκ ἔμελλε μὴτις. “You did endure, while your *metis* led you out of the cave where you were expecting to die.” Odysseus' use of μὴτις here, standing for both the clever thinking he used to escape the cave as well as the wordplay that was the means of that escape, clearly shows that he both understands and appreciates his own unique heroic method. However, it is this type of manipulation of speech, among other acts unbecoming of a normal Iliadic hero, that earns Odysseus some dislike among his peers. As Achilles bluntly states in *Iliad* 9.308-313;

ὦ πόδας ὦ κούρη, τίς σε βροτῶν  
 ἔμελλε μὴτις / οὐκ ἔμελλε μὴτις  
 ὅτε σὺν Πηλεΐδῃσι καὶ ἰδμεν ἄλλοι  
 ὅτε σὺν Πηλεΐδῃσι καὶ ἰδμεν ἄλλοι  
 ὅτε σὺν Πηλεΐδῃσι καὶ ἰδμεν ἄλλοι  
 ὅτε σὺν Πηλεΐδῃσι καὶ ἰδμεν ἄλλοι

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, much-devising Odysseus, it is necessary to speak my speech without scruple, both that which I think and as it will be brought to an end, so that sitting by me from somewhere or another you

not mutter, for hateful is that man, just the same as the gates of Hades who holds concealed one thing in his mind but speaks another.”

Achilles refers to Odysseus’ mode of talking as *huphōmōi*, meaning “mutter”, “murmur” or even “coo”. Achilles is comparing Odysseus’ speech to the pointless squawking of birds. Achilles compares himself, who devises (*phronēō*) an action the same as he completes (*phronēō*) it, to Odysseus, who conceals his plan in his mind (*phronēō*) but says (*phronēō*) another thing completely.

Odysseus’ exit from the cave is another sign of the deviation of his value system from that of the majority of Iliadic heroes. Odysseus rides to safety by holding onto the underside of a goat that is walking out of Polyphemos’ cave. The Cyclops cannot find Odysseus as he reaches around the goats with his hands looking for a man-sized being. Although this clever deception saves the lives of Odysseus and his remaining companions in doing so the hero stoops to a level that none of his contemporaries would have. This instance is much the same as Odysseus’ willingness to disguise himself as a beggar in the *Iliad* and slay people in their sleep. Extra-Homeric evidence suggests that although this behavior is the reason for his survival, it lowers his standing in the eyes of his fellow heroes. As Philoctetes recalls in *Philoctetes* 264-66, he is the one, *ὁ μὲν ἄνθρωπος*, “who the two generals and the Cephallenian king [Odysseus] threw shamefully on this shore”. The circumstances of this abandonment added even more to Philoctetes’ negative feelings towards Odysseus as seen in lines 271-73. *ὅτε μὲν ἄνθρωπος ὤνυχας ἐπὶ λίθῳ κειμένον εἶδον*, “[T]hen they were glad men as they saw me sleeping, from much tossing, upon the shore in a covered stone, leaving they departed”. Odysseus abandoned Philoctetes in an

underhanded way, waiting for him to fall asleep before sneaking off. This seems very unheroic to Philoctetes who is appalled that Odysseus did not confront him before abandoning him. This is just another example of Odysseus' dishonest and non-heroic behavior that no other heroes in the *Iliad* would participate in.

The next reminder of Odysseus' deception and its clever application occurs at the end of book 21 and beginning of book 22 in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus is once again disguised as a beggar in 13.430-40, this time to deceive his wife's suitors, recalling his capture of the prophet Helenus. Unlike the capture of Helenus however, Odysseus' disguise results in the need for force. Nonetheless Odysseus shows that he is not incapable of using force, only that he knows the proper place and prefers words over conflict. The entire episode with the suitors exhibits this fact. Odysseus spends almost the entire final quarter of the *Odyssey* determining the extent of the suitors' guilt by walking amongst them in disguise and talking with them. Odysseus uses speech and deception to determine his exact plan of action before he proceeds with force. One smaller example of this is Odysseus' fight with the beggar Arnaeus while Odysseus is disguised. When confronted and urged to fight Odysseus simply says, *μὲν γάρ, ὦ φίλῳ ἄνδρι, τί μὲν ἔστιν ἔργον;* / *• • • • •* . "Fortunate man, neither do I do you any evil or harangue you, nor do I grudge you being given anything or taking much."

Odysseus tries to diffuse the situation with words but when it is obvious that this will not work he quickly dispatches the beggar with his fists. In this type of situation the majority of other *Iliadic* heroes would have resorted to violence immediately. It is impossible to picture Ajax or Diomedes coming home to their family and lands to find them being exploited, and skulking around to determine the exact situation before putting an end to the problem. Warriors such as these two would have jumped right into battle without



asking questions. During the entire episode involving Odysseus' return to Ithaca, he hides his true identity from his son Telemachus, his father Laertes, and even his wife Penelope. This deception above all else drives home the way in which Odysseus' *metis* makes him almost incapable of establishing true and meaningful personal relationships with anyone, even his own family.

While Odysseus' *metis* may not allow him to interact closely with many people, it certainly does ensure his longevity and fame. The paramount instance of Odysseus' *metis* at work is in the creation and implementation of the Trojan Horse plan. Odysseus dreams up an incredibly complex plan that involves not only the construction of a massive piece of engineering but also the intimate coordination of the entire Greek army and the artful and bold deception of a single Greek soldier. As described in *Odyssey* 4.271-73 Odysseus is first responsible for planning of the Trojan horse:

• • • • • /  
• • • , • • • μ • • / • • • . “What sort of  
thing is this also the powerful man created and endured in the crafted horse, where in all  
the best of the Argives were sitting, bringing murder and death to the Trojans.” Odysseus  
is labeled as the one who • • • , “worked” or “made” the Trojan horse. Even further  
however, Odysseus holds together the soldiers within the horse in 4.282-84 when they are  
tempted by Helen, showing his resistance to deception along with his propensity for it: •  
μ • • μ μ • μ / • • • μ , • • • • • : • / • • • •  
• • • • μ . “we two both being impelled, eagerly desired either to go out, or to  
reply right away from within; but Odysseus detained and just held us from being let go.”  
Odysseus is the only one who understands Helen's trick and he must • • • • • , “hold back”  
or “detain” Menelaus and Diomedes from leaving the horse or calling back. Here we see  
Odysseus' cleverness as the savior of the Greek army. Odysseus' *metis* acts as a shield to

protect him from Helen's seduction. Unlike the other soldiers, he is not affected by his relationship to his wife, which Helen tempts by impersonating their voices perfectly. All of his relationships appear to be impersonal and unemotional. This episode reiterates the way in which Odysseus' behavior makes him unique within the heroic system.

Virgil depicts this entire episode from a different point of view in his Book 2 of the *Aeneid* as translated by Fagles. The Trojans' view of Odysseus interprets his *metis* in a completely opposite fashion from the Greeks. While the Greeks see Odysseus as clever and intelligent, the Trojans perceive him to be deceitful and conniving. The priest Laocoon attempts to warn the Trojans of the trap, "You really believe the enemy's sailed away? Or any gift of the Greeks is free of guile? Is that how well you know Ulysses? Trust me, either the Greeks are hiding, shut inside those beams, or the horse is a battle-engine geared to breach our walls, spy on our homes, come down on our city, overwhelm us." However, a Greek soldier named Sinon appears to alter the Trojans' minds, telling them of an argument with Odysseus that expelled him from the Greek camp. "Ulysses whispered slander and alarm; breathed doubt and malice into all men's ears, and darkly plotted how to strike his blow." Much the same as in the *Philoctetes*, Odysseus sends tales of his own evildoing to convince his opponents to trust a spy (Neoptolemus and Sinon). It seems as though Odysseus understands his enemies excessive dislike for his conniving ways, and uses this against them by sending false messengers that play on this hatred. He does this to the Trojans in the form of Sinon and to Philoctetes in the form of Neoptolemus. Odysseus' Trojan horse project is not only impressive in its scope and the perfection of its execution but also in the fact that Odysseus managed to convince the entire Greek army to undertake such an underhanded plan of action to win the war. Up until this point in the war everything had been decided by hand-to-hand combat outside

the walls. As Odysseus himself refers to it when asking to hear the song of the capture of Troy (8.494-95), • • • • • / • • • • •

• . “the trick which godlike Odysseus led to the citadel having been filled with men who utterly destroyed Ilium.” Odysseus refers to the Trojan Horse as a • , a “trick” or “deceit”.

Odysseus takes an unorthodox approach to following the guidelines of the heroic system, but he is still able to earn the honor that is the sole goal of that system. Although Achilles was briefly able to find a way to separate himself from the system, his method did not allow for a permanent solution, or even a safe return to the system once separation was achieved. Achilles’ destiny, if he chooses to fight in the Trojan War, is to die young but become famous. Achilles’ brief withdrawal from the heroic system gives him a fleeting glimpse of the long, albeit obscure, life he could lead instead of becoming an Iliadic hero. Odysseus manages to lead a long life while earning undying honor at the same time. He does this through the use of *metis*. Achilles and Odysseus are both linked by their opposing modes of action and their understanding of the failures of the heroic system. Achilles comes to understand the limited scope of the heroic and attempts to leave it behind completely before he is drawn back in even more fully. Odysseus seems to inherently understand the limitations of the heroic ideals and is able to push the limits of the heroic system without having to fully question the system as Achilles does. However, Odysseus is still controlled by the guidelines of the system and cannot actually act as freely as it seems. Odysseus’ *metis* is actually a way of separating himself from the people with whom he associates. While Achilles develops very personal relationships once he has established himself as an individual (Patroclus, Priam), Odysseus is still trapped by the heroic system and therefore cannot afford to have those relationships.

Odysseus' *metis* is the deceptive shield between himself and the people he interacts with that ensures him long life and glory but also makes close personal relationships nearly impossible. This fact highlights the limitations of both methods of dealing with the heroic system. Achilles is able to step past the heroic system, but he does not have the tools to make it work fully. Odysseus on the other hands has the tools to handle himself but is unable to actually break free of the heroic system. It is necessary for an amalgamation of these two characters to occur to fully complete the transition from the communal society seen in Homeric myth to the individual of present day society.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Neoptolemus**

The evolution of the heroic system can be seen in the transference of the ideals of the Iliadic generation of heroes to that of their sons who take over in the next generation. The new generation of heroes that follows those described in the *Iliad* is left with both the heroic tradition that has been passed down for countless generations and the new problematic stirrings created by heroes such as Achilles and Odysseus. The first and most obvious repercussion of Achilles' divergence should be readily noticeable in the life of his son Neoptolemus. Neoptolemus is a perfect point of connection because although he is part of the new generation of heroes as Achilles' son, he was also present for the fall of Troy. Neoptolemus behaves quite differently in several separate instances throughout his life, ranging from excessive rage to compassion. I suggest here that each of Neoptolemus' different modes of behavior can be understood as an entirely personal reaction to some circumstance that has affected his life, just as occurred with his father before him. Neoptolemus' fits of rage or moments of compassion define him as an excessively emotional hero in terms of the Homeric epics. Closer examination of Neoptolemus' behavior when taken out of the social context in which it took place depicts him as embracing the path of the individual taken by Achilles before him.

Stories of Neoptolemus' exploits at Troy are first told by Odysseus in book 11 of the *Odyssey* when he summons the dead from the underworld. Odysseus explains that Neoptolemus was not only intelligent and well spoken at the army's war counsels, • • • • • , "he always spoke first and he did not err in his words," but he also was always at the front of the fighting, slaying many enemies, • • • • • , "A man whose force gave way to no one." In briefly recalling the *metis* – *bie* opposition, it is evident that Odysseus is portraying Neoptolemus as someone who might possibly have possession of both traits. This is the first hint that Neoptolemus might be

combining the traits of Odysseus and Achilles in such a way that he can break free of the heroic system as neither of them could. Neoptolemus has directly inherited the fighting prowess that made Achilles famous but has also developed a penchant for discussion and compassion that is seen only in unusual circumstances in Achilles' life. One example of this for Achilles is the self-reflection that he shows in *Iliad* 24 as he returns Hektor's body and compares his own fate and that of his father, Peleus, to Priam's. However, this moment of kindness is only a result of the despair that has overcome Achilles when he realizes he is doomed:

• • • • • , • • • μ / • • μ • • • μ  
 • μ : / • • • • • : / • • • • •  
 • • • / • μ : (24.522-26)

“But come, sit down upon the chair, and we will allow our pain to lie down in our hearts although we are grieving; for there is not any profit in chilling lamentation; for thus the gods spun for miserable mortals, to live in grief.”

Achilles has developed an almost philosophical mode of speech brought about by his new external view of the heroic system. He has transcended cultural boundaries and is commenting on the generally unfortunate fate of human beings as a whole. It is evident however, that Neoptolemus' acts of compassion and use of *metis* are not fueled by the same depression that had overtaken Achilles. Neoptolemus' moments of benevolence and thoughtfulness are a result of his personal behavior and decisions rather than the effects of outside influences. Unlike Odysseus, who is isolated by his *metis*, or Achilles who

must first resign himself to death, Neoptolemus is able to initiate personal relationships beyond the extent of the heroic system without any negative connotations.

However, in opposition to this one brief portrayal of his use of *metis* while attending council, Neoptolemus first and foremost appears as a character fully invested in the use of force and performance of violence when he is described in the Homeric epics. But as will be made apparent, Neoptolemus' seemingly odd behavior is caused by the inability of the heroic system to fully understand his new, individualistic behavior.

Odysseus next describes Neoptolemus as they hide inside the Trojan Horse. While many of the men inside were crying and pale with fear, “•      μ      • •      • •      • μ  
...      • •      μ      , “He (Neoptolemus) pleaded very greatly to be released from the horse ... having evil in mind for the Trojans.” This description of Neoptolemus, although obviously in tune with his *bie* side, seems to be slightly excessive. The fact that Neoptolemus •      , “begs” or “pleads”, to be let out into the middle of an enemy's city just so he can attack them, makes him seem a bit crazy. This is especially apparent when comparing Neoptolemus to the other warriors in the horse who are pale with fear and only hope to survive. It seems as if survival is the last thing on Neoptolemus' mind and Odysseus describes him more as being eager to battle for its own sake than because he wants to earn glory, which is the sole purpose of most Iliadic heroes. Instead, he wants to do •      , “evil”, to the Trojans. Neoptolemus' eagerness to kill the Trojans is reminiscent of an enraged Achilles seeking revenge after the death of Patroclus. As Schein discusses the portrayal of Achilles late in the *Iliad*, “Apollo states clearly how Achilles' fury has put him outside the bounds of common humanity.”<sup>5</sup> In actuality Neoptolemus is

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<sup>5</sup> Seth Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, p. 157: “No, you gods, you wish to assist accursedly destructive Achilles, whose mind does not take into account justice and whose attitude is

responding to the death of his father at the hands of the Trojans. His portrayal as a crazed and battle-hungry warrior only appears because it is not possible for the heroic society to fully understand Neoptolemus' close relationship with his father that is causing this type of reaction.

Another one of the examples of Neoptolemus' *bie*, comes in stories like those telling Neoptolemus' violent actions that are in violation of sacred places, (Priam's death at the altar of Zeus, fighting/defacing at Apollo's altar in Delphi) sacrilegious stories which are seldom heard about other Iliadic heroes. Neoptolemus' disregard for the gods and his eagerness for confrontation (Trojan Horse, capture of Molossia and journey to Delphi) exhibit a recklessness that only becomes apparent in Achilles once the famous hero has stopped caring about his own life. It is as if Neoptolemus is an extension of Achilles from the time immediately before Achilles' death. Thus this representation of Neoptolemus cannot be exactly in unison with a normal, heroic *bie* temperament, because Achilles' behavior at the end of the *Iliad* was a direct result of separation from the heroic system where the normal *bie* temperament is expected. Once again, this initial reading makes Neoptolemus seem as if he is solely a man of violence. However, as will become apparent with more textual examination, Neoptolemus is not simply an extension of Achilles' excessive anger.

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inflexible; his disposition is savage, like a lion who, when he has yielded to his great strength and proud spirit, goes against the flocks of men to take a meal; thus Achilles has destroyed pity nor does he have in him any shame, which does much harm to men yet also benefits them. A man is bound to lose someone even dearer to him, either a brother from the same womb or even a son, but when he has wept and mourned, he lets him go, since the Apportioners have placed in humans a spirit of endurance. But this man, after having taken the great heart away from brilliant Hektor, fastens him to his horses and around his beloved comrade's tomb keeps dragging him, though this is in no way fine or better for himself. Let him see to it that we do not become angry with him, as good as he is: for it is dumb earth that he is treating foully in his fury. ([*Iliad*] 24.39-54)"



The complex nature of the character of Neoptolemus becomes evident upon a closer examination of Schein's quote. In Schein's comment he was describing generally Achilles' mindset after the death of Patroclus but more specifically the most brutal scene in the *Iliad*. As briefly mentioned earlier, in book 23 of the *Iliad* Achilles sacrifices twelve Trojan youths on Patroclus' funeral pyre in a brutal act of vengeance. This act of brutality is definitely excessive in its scope, if not unprecedented (Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter so that the Greek fleet can set sail for Troy). Neoptolemus sacrifices one of the daughters of Priam in an almost mirror image of this Iliadic scene in Euripides' *Hecuba*. The Greek messenger Talthybius tells Hecuba of the death of her daughter Polyxena on the tomb of Achilles. In what seems an almost gentle act, "• • • • •", "the child of Achilles, taking the hand of Polyxena, set her upon the top of the mound." Neoptolemus offers the blood of the girl to appease the spirit of Achilles so that the dead warrior will provide assistance to the Achaean army. In this case, the brutality of the act is curiously offset by the compassionate method of its enactment. We are reminded again of Neoptolemus' compassion as he completes the act of sacrifice. As Polyxena prepares herself bravely, Neoptolemus • • • • •, "both wishing not and wanting, in pity for the girl, thrusts his sword home." In this scene we see the conflict between Neoptolemus' sense of duty and his natural compassion that springs up several times throughout his life. Neoptolemus' natural compassion stems from his new sense of individuality, while his sense of duty is a remnant of the heroic system that still partially guides him. Neoptolemus' odd change in behavior is one of the earliest struggles between self and society that plagues Neoptolemus throughout his life. At this point, although Neoptolemus behaves in the way

prescribed by the heroic system he has grown up under, the struggle between trusting his own emotions and following those enforced by his society is definitely apparent.

Neoptolemus' and Achilles' interactions with the king of Troy clearly exhibit the way in which they both make different decisions even when placed in relatively similar situations. Achilles starts off as an unquestioning enemy of Troy and kills many of Priam's sons including Hektor. The majority of Achilles' fight against the Trojans is carried out solely for the purpose of glory and does not involve any excess animosity towards the Trojans. The death of Patroclus drives Achilles to become more violent. This is an example of the individual relationships that Achilles is able to develop which drive him more than the rules of the heroic system. This excessively brutal phase culminates in the death of Hektor and the despoiling of his corpse. Following Achilles' unsatisfying revenge he recedes into an almost philosophical phase of self-reflection. This is the time during which he interacts sympathetically with Priam. Neoptolemus on the other hand interacts with Priam just as Achilles acted with Hektor. Throughout his time at Troy Neoptolemus seems as though he is channeling the brutal vengefulness that led Achilles to destroy the Trojan troops and defile the body of Hektor. This difference in behavior illustrates the fact that neither Neoptolemus nor Achilles are being guided by a concrete set of guidelines as might be found in the heroic system, but are rather guided by a shifting personal compass based on a set of morals unique to themselves.

Achilles' moments of brutality occur only immediately after the loss of his dear companion Patroclus. Once Achilles' rage at Patroclus' death has worn off he becomes a civilized and almost benevolent hero. Neoptolemus on the other hand, commits a series of unfounded atrocities throughout most of his life. Neoptolemus' first meeting with Priam and his behavior at Troy is only the first of these events. The sacrilegious and

violent nature of Neoptolemus' sacking of Troy is most vividly highlighted in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Neoptolemus is referred to as Pyrrhus in his first appearance when Aeneas describes him standing triumphantly at the threshold of Priam's palace (2.470).

“There at the very edge of the front gates springs Pyrrhus, son of Achilles,  
prancing in arms, aflash in his shimmering brazen sheath like a snake  
buried the whole winter long under frozen turf, swollen to bursting, fed  
full on poisonous weeds and now it springs into light, sloughing its old  
skin to glisten sleek in its newfound youth, its back slithering, coiling, its  
proud chest rearing high to the sun, its triple tongue flickering through its  
fangs.”

Neoptolemus is referred to as a “snake. . . . swollen to bursting”; most likely because he has been feeding upon Trojan warriors as he was ruthlessly fighting his way through the city, gorging himself on the slaughter of Troy. The “poisonous weeds” that have fed him might also refer to the bitter experiences and hatred brought on by Achilles' death, that fuel Neoptolemus' desire to destroy Troy. It is apparent that Neoptolemus' efforts in the war are driven by the death of his father, just as Achilles' efforts were driven by the death of his close companion Patroclus. Aside from Neoptolemus' violent and deadly nature, this image points out Neoptolemus' youth and descent from a former time. This appears almost as if Neoptolemus is the rebirth of Achilles in a more evil form. Neoptolemus' shedding of his old snakeskin is symbolic of his status as a new, younger generation of hero that will follow the Iliadic generation.

The young hero proceeds to fight through Priam's palace, chasing the old king's son Polites before him. As Neoptolemus reaches the altar that Priam and his wife have taken refuge at, he slays Polites before their eyes (2.530).

“Suddenly, look, a son of Priam, Polites, just escaped from slaughter at Pyrrhus' hands, comes racing in through spears, through enemy fighters, fleeing down the long arcades and deserted hallways – badly wounded, Pyrrhus hot on his heels, a weapon poised for the kill, about to seize him, about to run him through and pressing home as Polites reaches his parents and collapses, vomiting out his lifeblood before their eyes.”

Neoptolemus is clearly channeling Achilles' rage at the death of Patroclus here; just as Achilles killed Hektor as his father watched from the walls of Troy, so does Neoptolemus kill Polites right in front of the altar where Priam is a suppliant. Neoptolemus next kills Priam himself. “[A]nd twisting Priam's hair in his left hand, his right hand sweeping forth his sword – a flash of steel – he buries it hilt-deep in the king's flank.” This moment of Priam's death is depicted along the same lines in both Euripides' *Hecuba*, (• • • • • μ • • • • • • • • μ (lines 23-24), “He himself (Priam) fell by the god-built pedestal having been slaughtered by the blood-thirsty child of Achilles.”) and Apollodorus' *Eptiome* (μ μ • • • • • μ • • • • • μ • • • • • . “Neoptolemus killed Priam who was fleeing for refuge, upon the altar of Zeus of the court.”). Neoptolemus is referred to as μ , “bloodthirsty” or “murderous”, an obviously negative description commenting on his penchant for killing. The two accounts locate the murder at the μ , “pedestal” of the

altar. One altar is *θεῖον*, “god-built” and the other is specifically dedicated to *Ζεὺς*, “Zeus”. In both cases the brutal and sacrilegious nature of Neoptolemus’ act is made clear by the obvious religious connotations of the location of the slaying; especially the fact that Priam was a suppliant at the altar of Zeus, the god of suppliants. Neoptolemus resorts to violence and does not give a thought to withholding from battle or what other choices he might have, behaving exactly like his enraged father in *Iliad* 18 when he learned of Patroclus’ death. It is very evident that at this point in his life at least, Neoptolemus is known as a brutal and unscrupulous individual, and is being driven by the strong personal emotions brought about by the death of his father.

Thus it is clear that Neoptolemus’ excessively violent actions at this point in his life are all for the purpose of avenging his father. While his behavior is described in the *Iliad* as uncontrolled emotion, further examination of Neoptolemus’ actions begin to show that this manner of conduct is only unusual in the context of the Homeric heroes’ belief system. Neoptolemus’ apparent overreactions to the death of his father actually help to point out the extremely impersonal relationships that are cultivated by most other heroes under the guidance of the heroic value system. Neoptolemus’ anger would make much more sense in a present day context.

Following Neoptolemus’ experiences at Troy, based on the values upheld in the heroic system, he should be content to journey home in peace. A typical Iliadic hero in Neoptolemus’ position would have had two central goals; avenge the death of Achilles and earn glory through battle. It is obvious that Neoptolemus has earned great glory and honor. It is made explicitly clear that Neoptolemus earns great glory in the sacking of Troy as Odysseus explains in *Odyssey* 11.513-16:

• • • • •     •     μ     μ     •, • / •     • • •     • μ     •     •     • • •  
 • μ     •, / •     •     • • μ     •     • •     •, / •     •     • •     •     •  
 • •     •     •     •

“But as often as we fought with the bronze on the Trojan plain, he would never remain behind in the throng or crowd of men, but he would outstrip them by much, yielding to no one in his might; and he struck many men in dread battle.”

The fact that Neoptolemus     , “ran ahead”, and was never among the     •, “crowd”, of average soldiers in the middle of the army signifies his bravery and elite status that is worthy of a large share of the plunder.

Neoptolemus has also avenged the death of his father by wiping out the entire family that was responsible. Although Neoptolemus did act somewhat excessively in obtaining his vengeance, those actions (the sacrilegious killing of Priam and Polites) can be attributed to his hurt and anger at the death of his father. The vengeance of any other Iliadic hero would have been achieved at this point in time, after the destruction of Troy and its king. As Seth Schein explains in *The Mortal Hero*, p. 132, “[Achilles] envisions that Hektor’s death would “pay back the spoils” of Patroklos; this is in line with the conventional value system, illustrated so often in the poem, whereby loyalty to a comrade and heroic honor are satisfied by the death of the slayer of that comrade, or at least by the death of another enemy warrior.” Exactly like his father before, Neoptolemus expects to be able to sate his vengeance by killing the people responsible for his father’s death. This concept is depicted in *Iliad* 12.392-95, when Glaucus is wounded in battle, his companion Sarpedon seeks vengeance, and is sated, by the death of a Greek soldier;

• •                      •                      / • •    • •    • •                      : • μ    • •                      μ , / • •    • •  
• μ                      •                      /    • , “Anguish came upon Sarpedon at Glaucus going

away, right when he was mindful of it; nonetheless he did not forget his desire for combat, but he striking Alcmaon the son of Thestor with a spear, pierced him.” Sarpedon is fully satisfied that he has avenged Glaucus simply by killing a random soldier. Thus we see how a Homeric hero typically behaves at the death or wounding of a comrade, in a way which it appears that neither Neoptolemus nor Achilles before him were able to act.

Neoptolemus’ inability to be appeased for the death of his father under the standards of the heroic system is the first sign of the unique personal ties that define Neoptolemus’ relations to other people. The first glimmer of this appears in the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*. The close personal relationship of the two warriors is what drove Achilles to his eventual death but also to questioning of the heroic system. Achilles does not have the tools necessary to exist in a world without the guidance of the heroic system that he has always known. However, Achilles first unsuccessful challenge of heroic society paves the way for Neoptolemus’ eventual break through. Neoptolemus develops a new way of dealing with people, especially those close to him, that is governed more by his own feelings than by what is expected of him under the heroic belief system.

By the end of the Trojan war Neoptolemus has achieved everything that an Iliadic hero should want within the bounds of the heroic system. He has fully avenged his father’s death, and earned a great deal of fame and plunder, including Andromache (a double dose of revenge and plunder), the wife of his father’s old enemy, Hektor. Despite this Neoptolemus does not simply return home peaceably and take over the family business from Peleus. While traveling home on foot Neoptolemus passes through

the territory of Molossia. Upon reaching Molossia,  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ , “and upon being victorious in battle he (Neoptolemus) ruled the Molossians.” This is a very unique *nostos* in that Neoptolemus continues to sack cities as he is returning home. The majority of the other main Iliadic heroes, including Agamemnon, Menelaus, Diomedes and Nestor, return home immediately without conflict. In *Odyssey* 3.165-69 Nestor tells of their return by sea:

$\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ ,  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ , /  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ ,  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   
 $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$  /  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ ,  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$  /  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   
 , /  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$   $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ .

“But I together with my ships in throngs, and those who followed me, I fled, since I knew that the god planned evil. The war-like son of Tydeus fled, and roused his companions. Fair-haired Menelaus came late with his ships, he overtook us in Lesbos, contemplating the long voyage.”

All of these heroes sailed home, almost in fear. Nestor uses  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ , “I fled”, and  $\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ , “he fled” to describe his own voyage as well as that of Diomedes. Neoptolemus, in very different fashion, walks home by land and continues to make war on the way.

Interestingly, the only other warrior who makes war during his return is Odysseus and as we know, Odysseus is also the sole hero who bends the constraints of the heroic system to meet his own ends. However, while Odysseus’ behavior stems from his general disregard for many specific, unwritten rules of the heroic system, Neoptolemus’ prolongation of conflict stems from his ongoing obligation to avenge the death of his father that he has not been able to appease within the boundaries of the heroic system.



This continued attempt at redemption makes Neoptolemus appear to be solely a creature of excessive *bie*, when in reality he is simply attempting to work his way past the emotional problems brought about by his father's death and find his own unique way of coming to terms with them as an individual.

The next leg of Neoptolemus' journey is a much-treated voyage to Phthia. This segment of Neoptolemus' journey is when further development of Neoptolemus' personality occurs that combines elements of compassion and violence. We hear of Neoptolemus' departure for home in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Hecuba is told that Neoptolemus and Andromache are already sailing to Phthia, •/ •  
μ , • • • / • • , • . "having heard of some new misfortune of Peleus, that Acastus, the son of Pelias, has thrown him out of the land." Neoptolemus returns to take back his hereditary lands from the current wrongful rulers after his grandfather's expulsion, as mentioned briefly in Apollodorus' *Epitome* book E, chapter 6, section 13. μ • • • . "Neoptolemus took over the kingship of his father." This simplified version is given greater detail in the *Dictys Cretensis*, a possible retelling of the lost Greek tragedy the *Peleus* of Sophocles. In this story, Neoptolemus avenges the overthrow of his grandfather by first killing the two sons of Acastus and then luring Acastus himself into a trap. Interestingly Neoptolemus' disguises himself to carry out these deeds in unusual Odyssean fashion. Nevertheless the violent nature of this episode is clear.

However, after the reclamation of Phthia, Neoptolemus decided to return to Molossia rather than taking back his hereditary lands; • • • • ,  
• • • • • ., "He (Neoptolemus) permits Peleus to rule the land of Pharsalia, not wishing to take the scepter while the old man is still living." This passage

from Euripides' *Andromache* shows a kinder side of Neoptolemus although it does not quite follow the expectations of the heroic system. Neoptolemus regains Phthia in a violent act of revenge for the expulsion of his grandfather as is natural. However, after the evil deed is repaid Neoptolemus gives up rulership of the land to his grandfather and returns to his normal life. This behavior is not in line with the Iliadic custom. It is obvious that Neoptolemus should take over his grandfather's kingdom as the next successor because Peleus is very old and not able to take care of himself or maintain his rulership. Neoptolemus' personal respect for his grandfather outweighs his obedience to societal norms. While this act exhibits Neoptolemus' further release of heroic ideals, another interesting story from this time highlights the turning point in Neoptolemus' early life when he gives himself definition as an individual.

The most compassionate act during this period in Neoptolemus' life indicates that he has finally become capable of relinquishing his vengeful anger and moving on.

However, the way in which Neoptolemus finally comes to terms with the death of his father is entirely different than the methods proposed by the heroic system. In Euripides'

*Trojan Women* Andromache pleads with Neoptolemus • • , "to bury this (Astyanax's) corpse." Andromache also asks him to leave behind • • • , • • • , "the fear of the Achaeans, this bronze-backed shield.", the very shield that Neoptolemus inherited from his father Achilles. Even further Andromache implores him to allow her • • • • • , "to bury the child (Astyanax) in this (the shield)". Although this is the child of his father's great rival Hector, Neoptolemus agrees. This episode signifies Neoptolemus' relinquishment of the insatiable vengeance that drove Achilles' to his death and was tying Neoptolemus himself to the same path. Neoptolemus shows kindness to the wife of the warrior who was in large part responsible for his father's

death. Even more astoundingly, Neoptolemus provides his father's shield for the burial of the son of that very man. Neoptolemus is in effect forgiving Hektor and all those at Troy for the death of his father. The giving up of Achilles' shield is symbolic of the release of Neoptolemus' obligation to avenge his father's death.

The importance of this new behavior is in the way it distinguishes the post-Troy Neoptolemus from his father as well as from his younger self. In their tenure at Troy neither Achilles nor Neoptolemus were able to sate their vengeance for the death of a companion. In very similar episodes the two relinquished their anger while facing the family members of their enemy. Achilles' discussion with Priam and return of Hektor's body in book 24 of the *Iliad* is near identical to Neoptolemus' conversation with Andromache and his allowance of the burial of Astyanax in Achilles' shield. However, unlike Neoptolemus, who surrenders his anger in a moment of self-realization, Achilles' act of compassion is driven by his hopelessness. Achilles explains his tragic outlook in one of his most famous quotes:

• • • • • / • μ : • • • • • .  
 / • • • • / • • • , • • • : /  
 • • μ • • μ • • , / • μ • • , • •  
 • • • / • • • • , • • • , / • • • • •  
 • • , / • • • • • μ • • •

“For thus the gods spin the thread for cowardly mortals, to live in grief:  
 But they are themselves unfeeling. For two jars of gifts lie on the floor  
 before Zeus from which he gives, one of evil the other of blessings: To  
 whom Zeus, delighting in thunder, gives a mixed set, sometimes he is

encountered by evil, and other times by good: but to whom he gives from the mournful jar, he placed as a maltreated man, and ravenous evil drives him over the divine earth, that man goes neither being honored by the gods nor by mortals.”

Achilles believes that mortal men can only experience bad and good in equal amounts, or lead an entirely unfortunate life. Either way, it is impossible to lead an entirely happy or fortunate life. Achilles has not released his anger but has instead come to the realization that his anger accomplishes nothing because he is bound to experience negative events no matter what. Achilles has given himself up to his fate.

Neoptolemus, on the other hand, is able to release his rage and then move on with his life. Neoptolemus has realized that the act of giving up his Achilles’ shield to benefit the wife and son of his father’s final rival is the only way that Neoptolemus can be at peace with himself. This type of compassion is not at all warranted by the heroic system, and Iliadic heroes might have considered Neoptolemus’ gift to Astyanax to be somewhat over the top and even insulting to Achilles. It seems to me that this action could be just as easily be perceived as Neoptolemus shaming his father’s memory by giving up the armor that is his legacy rather than acknowledging that Achilles has been properly avenged. This problematic episode begins to uncover the real driving force behind Neoptolemus’ actions. He is not simply avenging his father, nor is he trying to fit back into a normal heroic lifestyle. Neoptolemus’ actions are governed by something more personal than either of these possibilities. This passage, along with the other occurrences in Neoptolemus’ past, seem to describe a man who is more driven by his own emotions and ideals than by any outside system or influence. However, the true nature of Neoptolemus’

behavior is constrained by the limited sight of the heroic system in which the topic is discussed. What is actually the creation of individuality and an internal moral compass comes across as the formation of an emotional, almost crazy warrior who is defined at all times by excess. The world in which Neoptolemus is described is limited by the heroic system where there is no place for an individual who behaves in response to his inner desires rather than to the tenants idealized by that system. The subsequent events in Neoptolemus' life further support this interpretation.

After he has provided Andromache with a proper and honored burial for her son, Neoptolemus leaves for Phthia to reinstate his grandfather as discussed earlier. At this point in Neoptolemus' life he appears to be content. He has established himself as a ruler in Molossia and has retaken his hereditary land and placed it under the control of his grandfather. It is at this point in time that Neoptolemus undertakes his most discussed and final expedition. Each differing account of Neoptolemus' journey to the temple of Apollo at Delphi provides an alternate explanation for the young warrior's final role in the heroic system. Has Neoptolemus really been able to come to grips with the heroic system and function normally within it or has he taken the same path as his father?

The first and least treated account of Neoptolemus' death occurs in Pindar's *Nemean Odes* as the story of Neoptolemus' unfortunate death and the following creation of his hero cult is retold. • • • • • , / • • • • • : "[Neoptolemus] went to the god, leading possessions from the best spoils at Troy." Neoptolemus gets in an argument while he is sacrificing and • • • • • μ • • • • • , "a man struck him with a knife". The Delphians were • • • • • , "weighed down very much", by this unfortunate act. In this version Neoptolemus carries no ill will against Delphi or its god and his death is simply an accident. It seems possible that Neoptolemus is almost asking

forgiveness for his sacrilegious acts at Troy or at least trying to appease the god who was responsible for his father's death. Here we see a subdued Neoptolemus who is killed in a shockingly un-heroic manner. This young hero has apparently given up his quest for vengeance and only seeks a peaceful and pious life. He has earned fame and wealth from his heroic expedition and has returned home to enjoy the benefits of his conquest.

Neoptolemus appears to have accepted the heroic system and slipped within its safe confines without trouble. However, be it because of his previous acts of brutality and sacrilege or just an unlucky chance, Neoptolemus still meets an early death. This version in particular, reads as a commentary on the inevitability of disaster in Greek myth (as discussed by Achilles in *Iliad* 24) as well as the false guidance of the heroic ideals. In a manner propounded by the heroic system, Neoptolemus attempts to atone for his past by sacrificing and praying to the god he has most insulted. In a proper heroic world Neoptolemus would have been forgiven and allowed to continue on with his life. Instead however, he is killed. Neoptolemus' fate in this retelling brings to mind Achilles' musings on the hopelessness of human life quoted earlier. The circumstances in this version of Neoptolemus' death almost warrant the behavior of Neoptolemus in another retelling.

Apollodorus' explanation of Neoptolemus' death tells how the young hero went to Delphi • • • • • , "to demand back justice over his father from Apollo." In this encounter Neoptolemus • • • • • , "set the temple on fire", and • • • • • , "he was killed", by a man named Machareus for this reason. Neoptolemus goes seeking • • • • • , "justice" from a god in a blatantly hubristic act. This violent and confident attack on the temple of Apollo seems to be reminiscent of the Neoptolemus that conquered Troy and killed Priam. If this account were to be interpreted it would seem

that Neoptolemus has not, after all, forgiven the death of his father, but has transferred his rage from the Trojans to Apollo. In this version, Neoptolemus' acts of compassion to the daughter of Priam and charitable kindness towards Andromache and her dead son were simply a way to allow room for Neoptolemus to move blame to a new source.

Apollodorus' account of Neoptolemus' death is reminiscent of Achilles' continued rage even after the death of Hektor. As discussed earlier, neither Achilles nor his son, Neoptolemus, are capable of being satisfied by the simple eye-for-an-eye vengeance that is so commonplace in the Iliadic-hero system. Menelaus exemplifies this point in *Iliad* 3.97-102 when he attempts to stop the war without further bloodshed between the armies;

• • μ • : μ • • • / • μ • μ , • μ  
 • • / • • • , • • • • / • • μ • • • •  
 • • • • : / • μ • • • • μ • • / : • •  
 • •

“Hear me now also: for pain has reached my heart the most, I think that now the Argives and Trojans are to be separated, since you have suffered much evil for the sake of my rivalry with Alexander (Paris) which he began; and to whichever two of us death and fate are caused, let him be killed; but may you others be separated quickly.”

Menelaus explains that since Paris alone committed a wrong against him, he believes it is sufficient for him to earn his revenge by simply killing Paris and retrieving his honor and his wife. However, unlike Menelaus, Achilles is not satisfied by the death of Hektor, nor is Neoptolemus satisfied by the destruction of Priam and Troy.

Neoptolemus' violent behavior at Delphi makes sense given his emotionally driven existence as well as our outside knowledge that an attempt to earn forgiveness will have the exact same outcome. Both explanations thus far do an unsatisfactory job of giving closure to Neoptolemus' life and his search for individuality outside the heroic system.

Despite the problematic endings created in Apollodorus' and Pindar's versions of Neoptolemus' death, it is at least apparent that Neoptolemus did not fully subscribe to the beliefs of the heroic system. Neoptolemus acted on a much more personal level and was driven by his emotions rather than by the guidance of the heroic system. This is a possible reason for Neoptolemus' outbursts as well as his moments of compassion.

Neoptolemus' prior experiences with the heroic system had proven to him that it was unreliable. Because of this, Neoptolemus participated in a completely self-reliant and personally driven lifestyle that often placed him at odds with the values of the heroic system. This behavior becomes evident in Neoptolemus' excessive violence, sacrilegious acts, and misplaced compassion. While these actions all receive negative connotations in the texts examined thus far, I believe this is due to the inability of the society of that time to make sense of a true individual. Thus the actually progressive behavior of Neoptolemus comes across as barbaric within the constraints of the heroic system.

Achilles' actions in the *Iliad* represent the first step out of the entirely communal heroic system. Neoptolemus continues and completes this transition but becomes a troubling character in the majority of his literature as a result of the limited scope of the system discussing him. The varied versions of Neoptolemus' death highlight even more clearly the difficulties with which a society following a heroic belief system is able to describe a character such as Neoptolemus. Neither Pindar nor Apollodorus are able to contrive a proper ending for Neoptolemus' life because the type of belief that governed his life was



entirely new to that age. One later piece of Sophoclean literature however, helps shed new light on this problem and provides a more satisfying definition to the character of Neoptolemus.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes***

The past chapter has analyzed the character of Neoptolemus in ancient literature based on small references collected throughout many different texts. The combination of these numerous episodes has depicted an overly emotional, internally driven individual whose behavior changes markedly over the course of his lifetime. As discussed earlier this erratic behavior is actually a result of the misinterpretation of Neoptolemus' character because of the tenants of the heroic system. The real driving force behind Neoptolemus' seemingly sporadic fits of violence and overly emotional nature is caused by his development as an individual and his subsequent close attachments to other people, particularly his father. Full understanding of Neoptolemus' progressive role in Greek myth becomes apparent in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the only work in which Neoptolemus exists as a main character.

The *Philoctetes* takes place after Neoptolemus' arrival at Troy and shortly before the Trojan Horse episode, but was written much later than the Homeric epics. Odysseus brings Neoptolemus with him to Troy to collect Philoctetes and his famous bow of Heracles by any means possible. Odysseus tells Neoptolemus that he must use deception to steal the bow from Philoctetes, first making the injured man trust him so that

• . (lines 54-55) “It is necessary somehow for you to steal by trickery the mind of Philoctetes’ by speaking.” Odysseus’ statement is full of words that convey the *metis* strategy that he uses throughout the Homeric epics. Odysseus wants Neoptolemus to complete his mission “by deceit”, a word that is often associated with Odysseus in ancient literature, and “through speaking”. Odysseus is well known for his use of rhetoric to talk himself out of sticky situations; take the Cyclops’ cave as one example. Odysseus’ use of *metis* as a shield from personal relationships is evident from this early episode. It is also apparent that he is suggesting a new type of behavior to Neoptolemus that will help him survive in the heroic system as Odysseus has.

$$\mu^{\bullet} \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad , / \bullet \quad \bullet \quad , \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet \quad \bullet$$

Neoptolemus' speech is full of action. He uses the infinitive verb *ποιεῖν*, "to do", twice in this one sentence. The young hero further highlights his preference for action when he adds *ἢ δὲ βίῃ* (lines 90-91), "I am ready to lead this man by force and not by deceit." Neoptolemus' preference for *βίη*, "force", over the *λόγος* that Odysseus embodies, appears here for the first time in the poem. At the outset of the poem Neoptolemus is a typical Iliadic warrior, obsessed with force above all else. Although this is expected, the way in which Neoptolemus protests against doing something that he considers dishonest is somewhat unusual. While most Greek heroes would have preferred force over oratory, none of them would have resisted the orders of

someone as influential as Odysseus on moral grounds. Neoptolemus' perception of right and wrong is a new concept that does not appear in the same way in Homeric literature or in earlier accounts of Neoptolemus' life. Sophocles translates Neoptolemus' overly emotional nature into the morally driven individuality that it actually is, although it was not perceived as such in Homeric times.

Odysseus finally manages to convince Neoptolemus that deception is the correct method by appealing to his sense of the greater good. Odysseus says that the entire Argive army will suffer if Neoptolemus does not steal the bow, because that is the only way they can capture Troy and stop further loss of life. • • • / • μ • • , • • • (lines 66-67), "[I]f you do not do this, you throw pain on all the Argives."

This episode makes it apparent that Neoptolemus is a physically driven, if not violent man, who is shamed by the thought of deceit, as are most normal Iliadic heroes from this era. Despite this, Neoptolemus has a respect for the greater good that transcends his own moral discomfort. Once again this idea of "greater good" is one not typically seen in the *Iliad*. Every hero, although fighting for the Greek side, does so solely for the purpose of earning glory as is made strikingly clear by Achilles' withdrawal from the Greek army, regardless of fatal repercussions for the other soldiers. Neoptolemus' concern for the greater good is also representative of his morally guided and considerate nature, a nature that Odysseus, although he does not share it, is able to identify and exploit.

The next look at Neoptolemus' personality comes from a story he tells to Philoctetes. Although the story is a lie intended to earn Philoctetes' sympathy, it still says much about Neoptolemus' behavior. Neoptolemus describes his reaction when he learns that Odysseus has taken his father's arms: • • • μ • / • • • , • • • : • / • • , • ' μ • • • μ • / • • • μ , • μ • μ • ; (368-

O wretched men, you dared to give my arms to someone over me, before you learned from me?" Neoptolemus is describing himself as an extremely emotional person. He i

• • • “heavy anger/wrath”. Interestingly, Neoptolemus goes on to explain that after this, • • • • • / • • • , (374-75) “I, upon being so angered,

nonviolent fashion: • ••, • • •       $\mu^\bullet, \bullet / \bullet \mu$  •• • • • •

At first Neoptolemus sides with Odysseus and the army when Philoctetes

/ • • μ • • μ •. (925) “But it is not possible; both justice and

what is • , “just” or “right” and μ , “profitable”, two important ideals of the

make. Although Neoptolemus' behavior up to this point in the play is definitely unusual

makes it clear that he is still operating under the heroic system at this point. However,

Neoptolemus' belief becomes shaken by the way his own personal ideals clash with those

of the heroic system.

The dilemma caused by the conflict between Neoptolemus' own nature and his duty to authority and the greater good first becomes apparent in *Philoctetes* lines 902-06;

• • • • • / • • • • • . . . . • • • • • : • •  
• • • • • . "Everything is miserable, when upon leaving his own nature, someone acts as is not like him. . . . I show myself to be a shameful man: I will be tormented by this for a long time." Neoptolemus admits that he has acted against his own nature in betraying Philoctetes. Neoptolemus calls himself • • • • • , "shameful" or without honor.

Neoptolemus is defining honor in a different way from the heroic system. Neoptolemus claims he will be seen as dishonored because he has not stayed true to his own nature. He disregards the heroic system version of honor that he would be gaining by bringing Philoctetes to Troy and conquering the city. Once again it is apparent that Neoptolemus is more concerned with his own personal emotions and beliefs than with any outside governing force or person. He is obviously greatly distressed at the need to behave in such a dishonest way, disregarding the use of force and his feelings of compassion that he is naturally guided by. Just as with his father before him, the strength of his own feelings causes Neoptolemus to rebel against authority and against the belief system that gives that authority its power.

Despite Odysseus' manipulation, at the end of the *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus changes his mind out of pity and compassion for Philoctetes. This episode is reminiscent of Neoptolemus' struggle between pity for the brave and innocent Polyxena, and his need to appease his father and help the entire Achaean army. However, in this instance, Neoptolemus' compassionate side wins and he agrees to return Philoctetes to his home.

N: • • μ • • • • μ • O: • • •  
 • • • • , ; N: • • • • • • • •

“N: I will try to take back the shameful mistake by which I erred.

O: You do not fear the army of the Achaeans, by performing these things.

N: Together with justice, I do not fear your army.”

Neoptolemus is upholding what is just and correcting his mistake even with the threat of reprisal from Odysseus and the entire Greek army. Going against both his orders and what is best for everyone involved, Neoptolemus agrees to return Philoctetes to his home where the cripple will remain unhealed and Troy will not be taken. While this choice might at first seem foolish, Neoptolemus’ earlier behavior in the poem shows that his final decision is perfectly in line with his natural inclinations. Neoptolemus’ early argument for force over discussion arises again in his choice to battle the whole Greek army rather than overtake one man by deceit. The immediacy and strength of his compassionate feelings overcome the commitment he feels to achieve the greater good for the army. This exhibits again the attachment to certain individuals that is a driving force behind many of Neoptolemus’ actions, such as the brutality at Troy in response to his father’s death.

As the play concludes, Philoctetes says; • μ • • • • μ •:•• •  
 • μ • • μ • , • μ • • , • μ • , . (lines 1397-1399),  
 “Permit me to suffer these things which are necessary for me to suffer; which you  
 promised to me, touching my right hand, to send me to home, do these things for me,  
 child.” Neoptolemus replies; • • , μ .(line 1402), “If it seems good to you, let us

go.” Neoptolemus gives in to Philoctetes because of his compassionate nature and goes against the orders of his superiors and his own better judgment. Neoptolemus’ choice to side with Philoctetes over Odysseus exhibits the domination of the young warrior’s primal side over the mode of behavior forced upon him by the beliefs of his society.

Neoptolemus begins the *Philoctetes* as a young man being guided into a system of belief. While Neoptolemus’ natural and uncultivated characteristics peek through at first, in his preference for force, the guidance of Odysseus pushes him into a new mode of behavior. Odysseus’ prodding sets Neoptolemus under the ideals of the heroic system, but also injects Odysseus’ own brand of manipulative behavior. Odysseus instills ideas such as the “greater good” to mold Neoptolemus’ behavior to fit his needs. As

Neoptolemus first interacts with Philoctetes he is extremely deceitful, making up stories about his own life that play on Philoctetes’ sympathies. Eventually Neoptolemus’ original nature comes to the surface again when he is faced with the suffering of Philoctetes.

Odysseus and Philoctetes represent two different modes of belief and behavior that are open to Neoptolemus. Odysseus represents the communal group that is always driven by the rules and demands of heroic society. Philoctetes stands for the opposite of this; the isolation, self-dependence and • , “wild” behavior that is made necessary for him by his abandonment on the uninhabited Lemnos. Neoptolemus’ decision to help Philoctetes is the final step in cementing his identity as an individual that is not dependent on the guidance of the heroic system. Neoptolemus’ realization of his moral compass in the *Philoctetes* is the last link connecting the development of the individual out of the heroic system within which it could not arise.

The course of events discussed in this paper represent one small snapshot in the evolution of societies over time. Odysseus and Achilles represent the first tentative steps

away from the societal belief system that existed during the time of the Homeric epics. This heroic belief system was based entirely around the idea of earning everlasting honor through glorious exploits of conquest and war. Odysseus blatantly manipulates that system through his unique behavior and use of *metis* to ensure glory and long life for himself. However, while Odysseus' *metis* makes him preeminent within the heroic system, it also stops him from truly advancing past the limitations of that system. Achilles on the other hand, rises to fame by following the guidelines of the heroic system, but is destroyed by his brief yet successful advancement past the system's restrictions. Neoptolemus is the next step in this progression and must deal with the repercussions of his father's unsettling legacy as well as with guidance offered by Odysseus' inimitable behavior and by the heroic system itself. In much of the literature discussing Neoptolemus he is described as a man of excess, especially in violent affairs. However, it becomes evident that the heroic system is incapable of understanding and describing accurately the behavior of a character such as Neoptolemus whose behavior is so revolutionary. Neoptolemus incompatibility with the heroic system and his struggle to choose between the different paths presented him, becomes extremely apparent when one examines the numerous contradicting episodes and behaviors in Neoptolemus' life, especially the almost diametrically opposed tales surrounding his death.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* provides the only sensible and satisfactory characterization of Neoptolemus and manages to encompass the entire scope of the transition that occurs during Neoptolemus' life. The *Philoctetes* shows Neoptolemus' exposure to the pure heroic system, the *metis* path of Odysseus, and the eventual predominance and definition of his own self-governed, morally driven character. The entire scope of these events represents the transition from the communal, single-minded society of the Homeric epics



to the creation of the internally guided individual that becomes more apparent in present day societies.

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